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ABSTRACT

The writing across the curriculum program at La Salle University, Pennsylvania, derives its basic philosophy from Charles Bazerman's "The Informed Writer" which stresses that students learn about academic writing and reading in terms of a community of discourse. Though Bazerman's text is not used in the freshman composition course, students follow his sequence of assignments which require that students first express understanding of texts, then evaluate texts, and finally develop original analyses and arguments based on some research. Other required freshman courses are based on the same subset of Bazerman assignments. Writing assigned in advanced courses should have students practice the processes taught in freshman composition in a discipline-specific context. The aim of a writing across the curriculum sequence such as this is to show students the relationship between the writing they do in freshman composition and their writing assignments in other disciplines and also show them that writing is the key to entering into academic discourse. (Sample assignments for freshman composition, other required freshman courses, and advanced courses are appended.) (SRT)

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The Conversational Model: A Paradigm for Connecting Freshman Composition to the Disciplines

Margot Soven

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The Conversational Model: A Paradigm for Connecting Freshman Composition to The Disciplines.

Margot Soven

La Salle University
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La Salle University is developing a university wide writing program that will link freshman composition courses with new foundation courses and with existing courses in the major programs. The success of our writing across the curriculum program and the introduction of a new college curriculum in which writing is heavily stressed in all courses has stimulated us to strengthen the logical connection between the freshman writing course and writing assigned in the disciplines.

The premise of the new curriculum and of the writing across the curriculum project is that a major purpose of undergraduate education is to initiate the student into a community of discourse. While this community uses many dialects, it is bound together by shared practices of reading and responding in speech and writing. In this conception of education individuals become linked to the larger enterprise by internalizing a set of common questions or procedures for approaching and appropriating texts and problems.

Our concept of what freshman composition ought be conforms closely to Laurence Behren's description in an article in College English (Jan, 1980) as a "utilitarian pragmatist" approach that assumes that the processes of writing and reading in freshman composition should resemble the processes of writing and reading in other courses. Charles Bazerman's explicit delineation of these processes, set forth initially in "A Relationship Between Reading and Writing: the Conversational Model" (College English, 1980) and expanded on in his textbook, The Informed Writer (Houghton Mifflin, 1985 2nd Ed.) is our primary model for instruction, although we do not use his textbook for the course. We use Behren's and Rosen's Writing and Reading Across the Curriculum because we feel that the selection of readings is more suitable for our students. While Bazerman's notion that informed writing about texts requires informed reading is not unique to him, his description of the stages of entry into the "informed conversation" of the academy through mastering these processes is the best that we have come across.

In the remainder of the presentation I will:
a) describe the nature of the assignments in the Bazerman progression in greater detail;
b) illustrate the way we hope to relate assignments in freshman writing to writing assigned in introductory courses; and
c) illustrate how we hope to complete the BAzerman sequence in advanced courses.

At the outset of this discussion I should point out that Bazerman recommends his model as a framework, rather than a curriculum, in order to "leave each teacher free to interpret the consequences of the model through a matrix of individual thoughts, experience and teaching styles." Also, it should be noted that the sequence is cumulative, later assignments drawing on skills developed in earlier assignments.

Bazerman's sequence of assignments cluster in three categories: 1) assignments for expressing understanding of texts, 2) assignments for evaluating texts, and 3) assignments for developing original analyses and arguments, some based on research.

The first cluster includes paraphrase to encourage precise understanding of individual terms and statements, summary to reveal the structure and central points of a text, and analysis of the purpose for which the text was written and of the rhetorical techniques used to accomplish that purpose.

The second cluster, assignments for evaluating texts, include annotation, journal responses and the extended reaction paper in which students compare texts to their "experience, point of view, or common sense."(I will have more to say about the extended reaction paper later on.)

The second-cluster assignments just mentioned precede assignments stressing more formal comparison and evaluation of texts in terms of their own intentions (e.g., does the author achieve his purpose), or in terms of systematic observations. These can take the form of book reviews or reports. Other assignments in this category which emphasize comparing texts (how texts differ in terms of facts, ideas or underlying perceptions) are preliminary to eventually evaluating the claims of one text against another.

The third cluster, assignments for developing original theses and arguments, is introduced with the synthesis essay in which students combine a number of sources into a coherent overview of a subject. This assignment, designed to make the student aware of the problems of synthesizing information from multiple sources, could be given in the form of a research paper in which the student has the added task of choosing a question for investigation. I should emphasize that this paper, which relies exclusively on secondary sources, should not be confused with a research paper that requires students to systematically use the data gathering methods of a discipline to carry out an investigation based on primary sources.

At La Salle we have designed a freshman composition course based on this progression, while not slavishly following it. However, while we have accepted the skills defined by the Bazerman progression as the appropriate aim of composition instruction, we have also concluded that it is impossible to

teach these skills within the confines of freshman composition courses, or even in these courses augmented by a set of introductory foundation courses. Our aim is to extend the teaching of these skills throughout the curriculum by developing a model for the writing skills that should be reached at each level of instruction. Our instructional model assumes that teachers at every level are aware of what the students have encountered before reaching their courses, what they should meet in the current course, and what will come later.

Composition and Introductory Courses.

The composition and introductory foundation courses should be based on the same subset of Bazerman assignments. Although each instructor in freshman composition need not teach the exact same course, summary, critique and synthesis skills should be included in each course. We have mostly eliminated the "analysis of purpose and technique assignment," because it seems too difficult for our students. An assignment of this type is probably more appropriate in subject courses where students can be familiarized with the rhetoric of the texts in those disciplines. I might add that the failure of this assignment illustrates that freshman composition courses may not be able to introduce students to the specific rhetorical features that characterize texts in different disciplines encountered in a college curriculum, despite recommendations that freshman composition should be a universal introduction to reading and writing. (See the article by Jay Robinson in College English, Oct. 1985)

In introductory courses, assignments should be very similar in form and complexity to the assignments in freshman composition. In both types of courses students are writing about texts in ways that do not assume extensive knowledge of a discipline, whereas writing in advanced courses, as I will discuss, should be very different in character.

Informal Reaction Paper

The informal(or extended) reaction paper in which students compare a text to their own experience, common sense, or point of view, provides a good illustration of the linking of freshman composition to introductory courses. This assignment teaches students the skills necessary for the typical comparison or critique paper, both of which require identification of criteria or features for successful completion. It is eminently suitable for introductory courses since, as Bazerman points out, a logical entry point to the informed conversation is "to draw out the students' initial or starting context within which he or she approaches the work -- to give students a sense of their own opinions and identity defined against the reading materials" so they can begin to reconcile what they read with what they think. This assignment is also particularly appropriate in foundation courses which try to help students see the relationship of the

subject being studied to their own lives. This goal, I might add, is rarely reflected in writing assignments in such courses. More typically, assignments in foundation or core courses require students to use,prematurely, the analytical techniques of a particular discipline (for example, "Analyze Faulkner's use of setting in 'The Bear'.") Hence, the great disappointment for many instructors of introductory courses when they receive their students' first papers.

On pages 1 and 2 of the handout I give an example of the use of the "informal reaction paper" in both the freshman composition course and my introductory literature class. The assignment in composition asks students to comment on the validity of ideas on exploitation of students in school sports, whereas the assignment from my literature class asks students if one of the short stories we read contains an insight about life, about how people behave, that "confirms their experience, common sense or point of view." In effect, both assignments ask students to compare what they are reading with what they already know about a subject.

I might add that in addition to having value for the student, the informal reaction paper has value for the instructor as well, who may discover, as I did, that students' values and opinions are often obstacles to understanding the literature they read. Of course, I knew that all along, but this paper enabled me to understand where individual students were having trouble.

Two assignments in foundation courses in philosophy and religion also illustrate the utility of the "informal reaction paper."(see page 3) Topic I in Prof. McGinnis' assignment asks students to explain the transition from classical to historical mindsets in religious thought, to give examples from their own experience that illustrate the shift, and to decide whether their own religious thought reflects one or the other perspectives. The next topic requires them to decide how much change is acceptable. Prof. Strosser's students in philosophy read the "Dialogues of Hume" to determine which character's orientation is most similar to their own.(see page 4)

Assignments in advanced courses should build on skills practiced in earlier assignments, but should not resemble them in form or intent. Writing assigned in these courses should have students practice the processes taught in freshman composition in a discipline-specific context. Several of these processes should be subsumed in these assignments, and new processes should be added to aid students entrance, on increasingly sophisticated levels, into the "informed conversation" of their disciplines. For example, in an advanced biology course, students summarize a research report, criticize the research methods and the validity of conclusions, and comment on the relationship of the results to textbook material. Most important, students are asked to identify unanswered questions. This assignment draws on skills practiced in freshman composition and introductory courses, but in addition

asks the student to use discipline-specific knowledge to identify unaswered questions.(see page 5)

A very different kind of assignment in an advanced honors literature course also demonstrates how assignments in advanced courses can require students to use their understanding of the methods of a discipline in writing assignments. In this case students are asked to write an analytical research paper on one of the specified set of readings. This assignment is most unlike writing asignments in freshman composition in that students must choose and apply particular methods of analysis to particluar texts.(see page 6)

This last assignment resembles the most advanced writing assignments in the Bazerman progression in which students start asking their own questions and use the methods of a discipline to answer them. Prof. Burke's students will need to decide what questions to ask in their analysis, how to actually perform the analysis, and which research to accept.

Through a progression of the kind I have been describing, students enter more deeply into the informed conversation of our various disciplines. Student move progressively closer to developing the kinds of arguments that those initiated in the discipline will accept. Freshman composition and introductory foundation courses can do little more than begin this process.

We see the advantages of sequencing writing instruction according to the paradigm of the "informed conversation" as follows: students would hopefully see the relationship between the writing they do in freshman composition and their writing assignments in other disciplines; faculty will be encouraged to sequence writing assignments to be appropriate (The ten page research paper, for example, will disappear from the introductory course.) Teachers assigning writing in advanced courses could be assured that students have been practicing the skills necessary for completing them in previous courses. Because writing in introductory, intermediate and advanced courses, no matter what the discipline, will be similar, all students will be more aware of the development of their writing skills and increasingly metacognitive about their writing process.

In closing, I wish to emphasize that it is not our intention to make all teachers into composition instructors. But it is is important that all teachers are aware of good writing assignment practices and our model of assignment sequencing, so that they can do their part in our writing instruction program. If indeed one places value on the notion of the academy as a community of conversants to which we can help our students gain entry, and we believe that writing can help do the job, we must enlist our colleagues' energies. Freshman composition can do little more than prepare our students directly for the first stage of that exchange, and indirectly for those later stages. At La Salle we are working toward this goal by providing summer

workshops, focused departmental meetings, and close involvement of composition specialists with individual faculty members in order to get that message across.

Dr. Margot Soven
La Salle University
Phila., PA 19141

English 161 The Experience of Literature Fall, 1985

THE RESPONSE ESSAY

Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to reflect on the relationship of a significant theme in one of the stories we read to your experience, common sense, or point of view.

By "significant" I mean:

- a theme or insight that offers an interpretation of reality that is mature, that for example includes a recognition of the ambiguity inherent in moral choices, the complexity of human events and decisions, the three dimensionality of human "nature".

You will then need to decide if this theme or insight confirms or explains your experiences, common sense, or point of view. In other words does the story increase your understanding of human affairs or simply confirm what you already know to be true.

Developing the Essay: Develop the essay by explaining briefly how you know that the author is trying to express this insight. (for example, the consequences of certain actions of the characters, the actions themselves).

Then explain your reasons for find the theme significant.

* A variation on this topic would be an essay in which you disagree with a theme in a story. But remember, you are not asking what the story "teaches;" you are asking what the story reveals (see 110-111, Perrine, for a discussion on appropriate ways of stating themes.)

Concluding the Essay: There are several possibilities for concluding the essay. You may reflect on other insights in the story you could not develop. You may compare the theme to stories which attempt to deal with the same issue in a different way. (not exhaustive)

Length: 500-750 words double spaced. DATE DUE: OCTOBER 11

Draft review: October 3

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SAMPLE ASSIGNMENTS; FRESHMAN COMPOSITION #

1. Informal Reaction Paper

   a) (388) Describe an incident or a series of incidents that you have either seen or heard about or read about that illustrates either the position of the Positive woman or the women's as described by Schlafly. Do you reach the same conclusion from these incidents as does Schlafly?

   b) As the sports editor of your high school newspaper, you have been asked to recommend whether students should play a sport when they attend college. Based on your own experiences, respond to the ideas in John Underwood's essay (164) or Mark Naisoon's essay as you form your conclusions.

2. The Comparison Synthesis Essay

   a) You are a colleage professor who has been invited to talk to a high school English class about Orwell's motives for writing Animal Farm. Compare and contrast Orwell's "Why I Write" and the preface to the Ukranian edition of Animal Farm.

   b) You are a college professor who has been invited to talk to a high school English class about the reviewers' reactions to Animal Farm. Compare and contrast them. (See p. 638 for criteria)

3. The Simple Synthesis Essay

   a) You are a well known advocate of nuclear disarmament. You have been asked to address a group of students who you would like to persuade to adopt your position. Describe the effects of nuclear war -- on people, on cities, on industry, on the social order. Suggested sources: "Hiroshima," "Second Strike."

   b) You are an advisor to the president. He has asked you to discuss the spectrum of positions on nuclaear war from unilateral disarmament (Schell) to the plans for a successful first strike or for military victory (Gray and Payne). He would like to know which approach seems to you most likely to prevent nuclear war and which seems most likely to lead to it. Be sure to refer to material in the articles.

4. The Analysis of Fiction

a) Do you think it was necessary for Nora to leave Torvald? In view of her needs, and in view of his personality, do you think that she could have fulfilled those needs and remained.

b) What does Helmer's transformation from an accusing to a forgiving husband reveal about his character?

Pretend you are writing for a teacher of a class in literature.

5. The Report

a) Write a report on the problems and satisfactions of women who work. Interview at least three women in different kinds of employment preferably representing different age groups.

b) Write a report on the problems and satisfactions of women who do not work, preferably representing different age groups. Interview at least three women.

Pretend you are writing the report for your sociology instructor.

* These assignments are based on assignments in Writing and Reading Across the Curriculum (first and second edition) by Laurence Behrens and Leonard Rosen (Boston: Little Brown, 1982, 1985).

MODERN RELIGIOUS THOUGHT
Spring, 1985
Brother Michael McGinniss, FSC.

Preparing for Class Discussions. With each of the readings for the course, take a position on the issue(s) in the readings which you consider to be the most important. This does not mean cataloguing all of the issues which the reading surfaces. The positions or points for discussion can take various forms: agreements and disagreements with the author, analysis of difficult points, pointing to apparent contradictions in the author, comparing the writer to another previously studied, commenting on important matters omitted from the author's argument, showing how the writer's ideas illuminate contemporary experience, etc. The basic purpose of taking these positions, however tentative, is to facilitate class discussion.

Short Paper #1. Pick one of these topics, which reflect some of the issues which emerged in our class discussions in the first weeks of the course, for your first short paper (2-3 page paper described in syllabus).

1. From classical to historical mindsets. Explain this transition in your words and give some examples from your experience and your studies here at LaSalle which illustrate this shift. Does your own "religious thought" reflect one or the other perspective?

2. How much "change" is acceptable in religion or why is change in this area so difficult? This topic came up when we discussed the article on the classical and historical perspectives. If you select this topic, try to write from your own experience, rather than dealing with what "other people" supposedly experience.

3. Do you agree with the way that Thomas Merton analyzes US society and the violence within it? This is particularly from the selection from Faith and Violence. What is Merton's analysis; do you agree--why or why not?

4. What is the religious basis for Merton's vision of Christian resistance?
Again, basically from Faith and Violence. What is Merton's vision, how does it manage to change someone else's perspective, what do you think about it?

5. What does Thomas Merton mean by "contemplation" and why does he think it is relevant and important in the world of action? Is Merton's notion of contemplation similar to or dissimilar to your own ideas of "prayer"?

6. Other topics that have occurred to you?

Re: Hume's Dialogues on Natural Religion

Due Date: Thursday, March 6

The Dialogues of Hume has three participants: Philo the sceptic, Cleanthes the rationalistic theologian, and Demea the orthodox believer. It is likely your personal convictions approximate in part the orientation and beliefs of one of these more than the others.

For this paper, determine the character you can most closely identify with. Pointing out what you share and don't share in attitudes and beliefs with your "adopted" figure, develop an evaluation of his defense of his position in the context of the Dialogues. You might agree with his beliefs, but not with his defense of them. Perhaps you can propose alternative strategies or approaches to overcome his weaknesses. Perhaps you can strengthen his defense of his position along the same lines he has developed them. Perhaps you think the whole Dialogues works within a framework with inaccurate or unwarranted assumptions. Whatever be your thoughts, the purpose of this paper is for you to identify your own convictions, to aid in clarifying them for yourself, and to propose to yourself how you might think of justifying them. (Some questions are listed below as "prompters" toward this line of reflection.)

Criteria of Evaluation

1. Unity and coherence of the paper.
2. Accuracy in description and analysis of your "adopted" figure.
3. Quality of critical reflections and questions, as germane to the Dialogues.

Some "prompting" Questions:

Is reason a secure basis for religious faith?
Is reason totally irrelvant to religious faith?
Is religious conviction grounded in the emotional and affective side of ourselves? In our hopes and fears?
Is "experimental theism" too narrow in its conception of "experience"
Does supernatural supernatural religion warp the emotions and morals?
Is belief in an infinitely all-powerful and benevolent being an "offense against reason"?
Is the "argument from design" successful? In concluding to the God of religious belief?
Is belief in REVELATION the only alternative available for those who would believe in God?
Do the DIALOGUES suggest an opposition between science and religious belief? Is this a false dichotomy?
Would Christianity have been "better off" without philosophy or reason?
Is religion necessary to be a morally good person?

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Biology 303: Microbiology
Writing Assignment

Advanced Course -- Summary and Critique

Microbiology is one of the fastest growing disciplines in the life sciences. There are so many questions being asked and so many people trying to answer them that major breakthroughs occur almost daily. In an attempt to make you aware of these major advances, periodically you will be asked to read articles related to microbiology that appear in the current scientific or popular literature. In order to help you clarify your understanding of the articles and their implications, you will be asked to write a report on each including a brief summary and a discussion of the article.

Reading:

Select an article from a current (i.e. less than one month old) issue of one of the following periodicals:

Bioscience	American Scientist
Scientific American	New York Times
Trends in Biochemical Sciences	Philadelphia Inquirer
Science News	Time
Nature	Newsweek
Science	U.S. News and World Report

The article should not be a review, but rather it should be a report of a small segment of research addressing one specific phenomenon of microbes or one particular microbially-related medical problem. Acceptable topics include molecular biology, immunology, cancer etiology, and the epidemiology, diagnosis, pathogenicity, and treatment of infectious diseases.

Writing Assignment:

CONTENT - Write a brief (about 1/2 page) summary of the article you read. Follow with a discussion of the work reported. The discussion can be on any issue related to the article that you think is appropriate. However note that the discussion is to represent your ideas, not those of the author(s) of the article. Discussions might address some of the following points:

1. the validity of the methods used to obtain the data (Can you suggest easier or more precise methods?)
2. the validity of the conclusions drawn by the author(s) (Was the logic sound? Were the assumptions reasonable?)
3. the relationship of the results discussed in the article to phenomena discussed in the textbook or to related phenomena you have read about elsewhere (cite reference)
4. implications of the work not discussed in the article

Always include a brief discussion (at least one sentence) of the question(s) that the article leaves unanswered and/or of the next experiment which needs to be done to follow-up on the work described in the article.

AUDIENCE - The summary and discussion should be written so that, without reading the article, any other student in the class can readily understand all of the points made in both the summary and the discussion.

FORM - The length of each report should not exceed 1 1/2 typewritten pages. (Reports may be submitted on loose leaf paper.) At the top of the first page include a complete citation of the article you read. (Cite using ASM style.)

EVALUATION - The reports will be collected and evaluated for conciseness, accuracy, and clarity. These assignments will constitute 10%

English 370
Literature, Art, and Religion
Instructor: Bro. Daniel Burke

Advanced Course -

Application of Methods of a Discipline

. Nature, Scope, and Purposes

This course will explore the relations between the arts, especially literature, and religion, specifically Christianity. Possible material that could be considered in such a course is vast, for religion and the arts were closely interrelated for centuries in the West and, even in our more secular age, they have complex if indirect connections. The main purpose of the present course, therefore, is simply to explore the frequent interactions of these realities from the thirteenth century to the present.

Thus, some of the presentations will be about general and theoretical problems, as in considering the nature of the aesthetic and the religious experience. Other sessions will be concerned with specific artists or specific works of literature, but also of graphic art and, occasionally, of music.

A subsidiary aim of the course will be to develop some analytical skill in dealing with works of art from different points of view and to have a clearer notion of the history of art and religion in the West.

Texts

A. Maynard Mack and others, World Masterpieces, Vol. I.

B. Helen Gardner, A Book of Religious Verse.

. Assignments

A. Assigned readings.

B. Two one hour exams; a two-hour final.

C. Two papers

1. Due on October 21, a short analytical paper (3-4 typed pages) on one of the following: Sir Gawain and the Green Knight; The Second Shepherds Play; (single works of) Fra Angelico; Josquin des Prez; Crashaw; Bernini; Monteverdi; Mozart.

2. Due on December 2, an analytical and research paper (8-10 typed pages) on one of the following: Georges Bernanos, Diary of a Country Priest; Graham Greene, The Power and the Glory; (single works of) Beethoven; Dostoevski; Tolstoy; Rilke; Kollwitz; Beckett.

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